

Opening Statement of Chairman Bob Ney
House Administration Committee Hearing on the
Emergency Preparedness of the House
and the Evacuation of May 11, 2005
June 9, 2005

I'd like to welcome everyone here today to the Committee's oversight hearing on the security and emergency preparedness efforts in the House of Representatives. On our first panel we will hear from the people responsible for life safety here on the House side of the Capitol. We will have Bill Livingood, House Sergeant at Arms; Terrance Gainer, Chief of the Capitol Police; and House Chief Administrative Officer Jay Eagen. Our second panel will consist of individuals with expertise in emergency preparedness, threat assessment, evacuation procedures, and movement of large crowds.

Before we really get started with this hearing, I want to say a few things about the recent evacuation on May 11th. In the event of a threat from an incoming aircraft, the police have mere minutes to assess the nature of the threat, make the decision to evacuate, and, if they do decide to evacuate, get everyone out and away from the buildings quickly and safely. There is little to no margin for error, and I think that overall our United States Capitol Police did a superb job of evacuating the tens of thousands of people from the Capitol and the House and Senate office buildings in a quick and efficient manner. Not only that, but they got everyone back into the buildings in a safe and efficient manner so that we could resume the work of Congress. I thought it went very well.

I remember September 11th 2001, and the relatively ad hoc way these buildings were emptied. The bravery and professionalism of the Capitol Police on September 11th was exemplary, but it was clear to everyone involved that there was a real need to revamp and improve our preparedness, training, and communication procedures. The witnesses

on the first panel, and the organizations they lead, have worked tirelessly since 9/11 to make these improvements, and we have come a very long way.

The Capitol Police are highly dedicated, highly trained first responders. At the direction of this Committee, the Chief and the Capitol Police Board have worked to ensure effective and redundant command and control functions. They have drilled countless threat scenarios and conducted quarterly drills of the House's evacuation plans. The department has worked closely with other local and federal agencies to share intelligence information, to monitor air and vehicular traffic, and to coordinate security for large events such as the Presidential Inauguration. This coordination and information sharing is in direct response to the threat environment we live in, and is crucial to our preparedness efforts.

The Committee has authorized deployment of a multi-layered emergency communications system that is controlled by the CAO and Capitol Police and utilizes email, telephone and portable annunciator announcements in addition to our audible evacuation alarms. These systems provide us with important capabilities to communicate with Members, staff and visitors during emergencies.

The Hearing today will provide an opportunity for the Committee to examine past and current efforts to improve the House's emergency preparedness, but will also provide an opportunity to identify areas in need of further improvement. Our second panel will offer insight into technologies and best practices for emergency preparedness, and suggestions on how to apply these technologies and best practices to help us achieve our collective responsibility for the life safety of visitors, Members and staff.

Again, I want to recognize and thank all those who work day and night to make this campus safe. We all hope that our emergency plans never need to be implemented, but this Committee takes its oversight responsibility very seriously, and we wish to ensure that our plans and systems are adequate to respond to any emergency.